



LA LECHE LEAGUE OF MICHIGAN

Testimony before the House Judiciary Committee

Dec. 2, 2009

RE: House Bill 5515, breastfeeding rights

Chair Meadows and Members of the Committee:

My name is Sue Stuever Battel. I am a mother of two and the Area Coordinator of Leaders for La Leche League of Michigan, the non-profit, mother-to-mother breastfeeding support organization. I respectfully request that HB 5515 relating to breastfeeding rights be passed.

I represent 225 accredited volunteer Leaders throughout the state who hold support meetings and provide accurate information and encouragement to women who want to breastfeed their children. We hear all too often from women who have been confronted in public spaces for breastfeeding their babies. The places vary, but the stories are similar: A woman is harassed and sometimes threatened, bullied, or reduced to tears — all for doing what is necessary to sustain her child's life while she goes about her normal daily activities.

When these women come to us for support, all we are able to tell them is, "That should not have happened." However, the harassment does happen.

Just three days ago in Harper Woods, Michigan mother Mary Martinez was told she had to leave a Target store because she was breastfeeding her four-week-old infant daughter. Store personnel called police and the woman and her family left embarrassed and frustrated.

"Jose and Mary Martinez visited a Target store in Harper Woods on Sunday. The mother says she started breast-feeding her child, security said it was illegal, they disagreed, and then the cops were called." (Fox 2 Detroit, Nov. 30, 2009: "Nursing mom: Target called the cops")

Our own La Leche League Leader Molly Bascom-Keller is among many women subjected to a similar ordeal. She was harassed while breastfeeding her baby at Summit Place Mall in Pontiac. It wasn't the first time she faced this discrimination, having also been hassled at the Detroit Zoo, museums, and restaurants.

"The 31-year-old Oak Park woman was inside the mall's primary-colored play structure, discreetly nursing her baby while her older children romped in the ball pit. She said a mall employee crawled on hands and knees through the child-size tunnel toward her, then began screaming for her to stop breast-feeding. The guard accused her of offending other customers while wagging a finger in the nursing mother's face, Bascom-Keller told the *Detroit Free Press* for a story Tuesday." (Associated Press, Feb. 7, 2003: "Moms face challenges breast-feeding in public")

Without HB 5515, nothing prevents these scenes from continuing to happen.

The only Michigan legislation that addresses breastfeeding consists of passages that exempt a woman breastfeeding a child from being considered public nudity (Michigan Compiled Laws § 41.181, 67.1aa and § 117.4i et seq., 1994).

While La Leche League of Michigan believes it is a woman's right to breastfeed her baby wherever she and the child are legally allowed to be, this is more than an issue about the mother. It's about the baby's health and well-being.

Breastfeeding does not stop being best for babies when a mother and her child are in a public place. A hungry infant must be fed. It is detrimental to a baby's health and to a mother's milk supply to wait.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sue A. Stuever Battel". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letters of each name being capitalized and prominent.

Sue Stuever Battel

Area Coordinator of Leaders

La Leche League of Michigan

Nursing Mom: Target Called the Cops

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By ROOP RAJ
myFOXDetroit.com

HARPER WOODS, Mich. (myFOXDetroit.com) — Jose and Mary Martinez visited a Target store in Harper Woods on Sunday. The mother says she started breast-feeding her child, security said it was illegal, they disagreed, and then the cops were called.



She's a mother of three. The youngest, her four-week-old girl, Raka. Breast-feeding is a daily part of life whether at home or at the store. That's why Mary Martinez was surprised to be stopped at the Target store. She and her husband told this by security: "He said, 'It's against the law. You have to go,'" said Jose Martinez.

Jose, a Detroit police officer, knew it isn't against the law even in the electronics aisle at Target. The couple say it wasn't crowded in that section at the time.

"It wasn't busy. One gentleman came through and ... he complained about the prices," said Mary Martinez.

Harper Woods police were called to the scene. They joined Target security talking with the Martinez family until the couple and child left embarrassed.

"I asked one of them if it was indeed illegal maybe in Harper Woods to breast-feed. He said, 'No.' And that was it. We got our stuff together and we left," Jose Martinez said.

FOX 2 contacted Target's corporate headquarters. They tell us they allow mothers to breast-feed in their stores. But, "This specific situation escalated to a point where we were concerned for the safety of our guests, so law enforcement was called. We regret the incident in our store and will continue to provide a shopping environment that respects the needs of all guests, including nursing mothers."

"Forcing me out of the store. Two security guards, the manager or team leader, two officers, they just made a spectacle and a scene. I feel like I can't go to that specific Target anymore," Mary Martinez said.

In addition to talking with the corporate management at Target, we spoke to the manager of the Harper Woods store. She says breast-feeding is certainly not discouraged inside of her store.

<http://www.myfoxdetroit.com/dpp/news/breast-feeding-incident-at-local-target>